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U.S. Rep. Mark Kirk and 24 seventh-grade students kicked off the second year of the Tenth District Laureates Program recently with a day of intensive study and laboratory work at the Rosalind Franklin University of Medicine and Science. The students enrolled in Kirk's "mini-medical school," the theme of this year's Laureates Program.

Backed by the teachers and experts of his education advisory board, Kirk said the Laureates Program strives to provide highly-focused education opportunities to seventh-grade gifted students in the Tenth District.

"Mini-medical school gives the best and the brightest in the Tenth District the opportunity to explore medicine and to determine whether they want to become a doctor, nurse or surgeon," said Kirk, who is working in Congress to provide more funding for national gifted education programs.

"Allowing gifted students to be challenged outside the classroom provides an opportunity for them to tap into their potential and possibly pursue their dreams."

On arrival at Rosalind Franklin, the students received stethoscopes and interacted with medical students. The highlight of the program was a visit to the university's anatomy laboratories where they learned the difference between healthy and unhealthy organs.

Twelve Tenth District middle schools (Deerfield District 109, Prospect Heights District 23, Kenilworth Schools, Lake Forest District 67, North Chicago District 187, North Shore District 112, Northbrook District 28, Northbrook/Glenview District 30, Rondout School District, Sunset Ridge School District, Waukegan District 60 and West Northfield District 31) are participating in the Laureates Program. Other field trips planned this school year include Naval Station Great Lake's medic training facility, Abbott Laboratories and the Museum of Science & Industry where students will participate in a video conference and view open heart surgery.